What Well Dressed Women Wear

(Above) left to right: Suit of brown duvetyn trimmed with brown fur; brown velvet hat (in circle) with small brown feathers under the brim; frock of brown crepe de chine.

(Below) two frocks of blue serge with bright embroidery.

By ANNE RITTENHOUSE.

THIS is the day and the hour to struggle with the exasperating wardrobe that accompanies one's daughters to school. There may have been an era in which the girl herself thought less of frocks than examinations, but it has not reappeared in the memory of this generation.

The ambition for superiority in learning may not have been entirely eclipsed by the desire to show other girls that one knows the best and the most approved way to wear one's costumes and do one's hair, but judging from the action and talk of the majority it is pretty clearly evident that lessons are a necessary adjunct to correct dressing.

Even the mothers are not exempt from this show of vanity. They realize probably that one must move with the current or be drowned. It has been dinned into their ears until they are acutely aware of the fact that dress does make a difference.

It is bitter knowledge, in a way, for it compels the struggle for clothes to begin five years sooner than it should, and merely adds to the troubles of a decade that begins to feel as if this generation was a camel to whom the last straw had been added.

Maybe along with the ascendancy of learning over costumery in a girl's mind there was a light regard for clothing as a problem. Life was not so complex, the demand was not so exacting, seamstresses and home dressmaking were not put out of business by the vast army of foreigners in sweatshops turning out thousands of garments that changed in character and silhouette as though they were attached to a weather vane.

Turning Out a Wardrobe.

It was not above the dignity or beyond the talent of the home circle to turn out the entire wardrobe of its members seasonally, and if one secured the services of the town dressmaker the price was moderate. In such eras the necessity of clothing the body as the calendar marked off the varying periods did not assume the distorted shape it has to-day. No family had to do sums in arithmetic for weeks in order to arrive at a safe and sane conclusion as to what could be spent on one suit and one week's food bill at the same time.

Vanity, a desire to shine as a star in one's group, the pleasure of variety, were connected with the preparation of a wardrobe, because they are fundamentals in one's character, but they were unmixed by fretfulness and anxiety, by the excruciating problem of how to pay.

In such periods of our social existence on this continent a schoolgirl's outfit was a pride to the mother and sometimes a joy to the girl. There had not crept into the youth of the land that superiority of mind toward dress, the consciousness that the girl is the purveyor of the dominant fashions of the age and not the woman of maturity.

Such knowledge has been quiescent since the days when girls married at 16 and retired from society at 30, when they did not dance in middle age nor spend their lives in a round of gayeties after they settled down to the problem of managing the house and educating the children. By the way, when one runs the eye over the printed pages of other times and other manners and finds how commonplace were the marriages at 16, which presupposes courting and selection before that age, isn't it curious how mothers are appalled at the desire of a girl of 16, in the present era, to have beaux? Why is it so shockingly mature, a thing to be severely reprimanded now, when our near ancestors, whom we are continually quoting as models of behavior and dignity, connected early girlhood and romance without a qualm?

Opens Tempting Digression.

The subject opens a tempting digression. When one talked through the early evening hours with those fine old peasants of France with whom we took our meals in tempestuous days, and when one listens to the stories of our own aged in this country, the mind starts on a long, long trail. Have we improved the character of the world by barring out early marriages and encouraging the sophisticated young to careen around the planet in the search for education, adventure, experience? Do they make better marriages and better mothers?

But speculation is fruitless and analysis useless. Each of us is armed to the teeth to-day to combat the dangers that we know are in front of and behind us, and we resemble in our own minds our ancestors, who were pioneers, and to whom the mere elementals of life were food for sufficient thought.

We wonder if we cannot train our boys to be paperhangers at $12 a day and hod carriers at $8 a day rather than send them to college, fitting them for we know not what. The former method would at least assure them of the possibility of marriage and the pleasures of fatherhood. The elemental problem of food and clothing would not drive them to the brink of suicide.

Whatever the social condition of to-morrow or of yesterday, the present problem takes one's vitality. Children are with us; they must be got ready for school; the girls are arbiters of what they wish to wear; mothers are more often consulted than obeyed, and whether or not the world is worse or better is futile guessing.

That the task of getting the modern girl equipped for the winter in a dormitory is made easier by the insistence of the girl that she cooperate in the selection of costumes is a question answered differently by many mothers. There are some mothers who cling to the tradition that the girl must wear what she provides. Others who gladly give up the entire process of shopping to the fledgling.

It is not always possible for a mother to give good advice on fashions. She may have been absorbed with the household so long that she knows little of the changes that have taken place in the scheme of dressing. She may not be conscious that the girl of to-day is permitted a degree of sophistication in her clothes that must be reckoned with.

There is actual agony in a girl's life if she is sent to school with clothes that radically differ from the fashions adopted by the others. There is a deep seated humiliation that lasts through life if it is accompanied by loss of prestige and the sense of equality with those who are closely quartered with her. Even the philosophical adult cannot fail to shrink from ridicule, spoken or looked. Why does she continually urge a child to be independent of such ridicule?

The Force of Imitation.

It is because there are many elements embodied in the preparation of a schoolgirl's outfit that the mother approaches the problem with misgiving. She knows her limitations, she reproaches herself for not keeping up with the procession of style, she feels she will be keenly mortified if her daughter falls below the standard set by the girls among whom she must spend the winter.

Such is the mental perturbation of one group of mothers. The other group are worried in their attempt to check the sophistication of their daughters and their desire to appear as fully grown and experienced.

Between the two evils there is slight choice. The mother is unhappy whichever extreme is reached. The girl is never unhappy if she desires to paint her lips and is permitted to do it. The paint is merely a symbol. Much else goes with it.

It is to be supposed that each girl apes the others. If it were not the fashion for youngsters of 16 years to adopt the mannerisms, good and bad, of their elders mothers would have no responsibility on this score. It is because the movement is so large and strong that there is difficulty in fighting it. We must answer that insistent query of the young girl: "Why can't I do it if all the other girls do it?"

There is no place where reform is more needed than in schools where girls are finishing their educations. When one is old enough to go to college there does not seem to be so much desire to paint and powder, to build a Japanese coiffure, to clothe the body in the most exaggerated Franco-American styles. Possibly the college girl is a serious creature, fully prepared to study and not to waste vitality on that frivolous thing called fashion. Whatever the reason, she is not in need of drastic reform like her younger sister who is going through her last year of a finishing school.

It is difficult to advise from what source the reform should spring. Teachers appear to be the correct ones to govern clothes. But judging from the masses of young school girls one meets at the theatres, at the railway stations, beginning and finishing holidays, the teachers are not present when the young girl makes up her costume for the public.

If the mother should be the adviser she should get to work. Through some system of mental persuasion she should teach a young girl that it is more dignified to look different from the masses on the streets, that it is more piquant to adopt a mode of one's own, rather than follow the commonest fashions that prevail.

Possibly one can appeal to her pride through this reasoning. It is an argument one would like to hear preached in every gathering where there are young women who have wealth and position.

Far too many of them follow the fashions that dragged to the gutter and which are often associated with those who know little of bath tubs, nothing of fresh linen; whose table manners are those of Mr. O'Brien's childlike savages in the South Sea Islands, and whose English must have been learned by word of mouth. It is not even reminiscent of a good high school education.

It is really a momentous matter, this reform among school girls between 16 and 18 years old. In some manner their costumery could be connected with their education. Paint could be abolished with slang, Japanese coiffures could be suppressed with split infinitive, wilfully transparent clothes could be treated as severely as the wrong spelling of a word.

It is the force of imitation that has brought about the curious costumes and masks of faces that one sees on the average school girl. Therefore the reform should be general.

The fashions of the autumn have been launched, and the straight line, the loose belt, the short skirt, short sleeves, plaids combined with solid colors, gushes around the hips, are fashions that have been reinstated. France and America have swept away a great mass of futilities, a tidal wave of ruffles, frills, panniers, in favor of the simple contour that was adopted during the war.

A few of the boarding schools that have an exclusive set of students insist that the girls wear the dark serge skirt and Peter Thomson of white or blue duck as a uniform during school hours. If this idea should spread the task of preparing dozens of varied frocks and blouses would be eliminated. A mother with independent ideas would be wise to prepare such a school uniform for her daughter if she could be persuaded to wear it.

Notes on Recent Books

Vernon Kellogg, who was known as a scientist long before he went to Belgium as Hoover's first assistant, is the author of "Nuova, the New Bee," which Houghton Mifflin Company will publish this fall. The heroine is a bee who rebels against the traditions and customs of her community. The book is described as a story, a fable and an allegory, for running through it is satire on types of modern women and the socialist propaganda, which would turn the world into one vast bee hive.

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The annual prize of $500 offered by the Poetry Society of America has been awarded for the year 1919 to John G. Neihardt's "The Song of Three Friends." Clement Wood's "The Earth Turns South" and Amy Lowell's "Pictures of the Floating World" were tied just below the winner. The judges were John L. Lowes, Edwin Arlington Robinson and Alice Corbin Henderson.

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A book which has attracted much attention in England, J. H. Harris's "Africa, Slave or Free?" is to be published here soon by Dutton & Co.

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To write "Mary Wollaston," a novel of the "regless age," which Bobbs-Merrill will bring out next month, Henry Kitchell Webster found it necessary to dictate to a stenographer in a bare office in an Evanston, Ill., business building over a garage. He says he was too comfortable in his own home to catch the real spirit of the age. He tried writing in Paris, in New York, in "dens," in woodland cabins and quiet farm houses, but "could never feel the pulse and swing of this 'restless age' until I had a hard seat in the midst of restlessness. In a great city one catches the tune which is sent out by the highly energized life of America."

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"The Thread of Flame," Basil King's new novel (Harpers) is the story of a man who "came back from the dead." After their three years' separation his wife said, "You must promise never to ask me what happened during those three years and I will promise never to ask you."

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The fifteenth printing of Henri Bergson's "Creative Evolution" is announced by Henry Holt & Co., who have just published his latest book, "Mind Energy."

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"The Frontier in American History," by Prof. Frederick J. Turner of Harvard University, to be published next month by Henry Holt & Co., discusses the exceptional significance of the West in American political development. Prof. Turner comes from a migrating people who opened new countries, planted new communities and were typical of the people whom he had studied.

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Andrew Carnegie's autobiography is to be published by Houghton Mifflin Company in October. It begins with his birth in Scotland and ends with his friendships of later years, his relations with such men as Lord Bryce, Lord Morley, Matthew Arnold, Viscount Grey, John Hay and others. The same publishers will have a new edition of Henry Cabot Lodge's "Life of Washington," and in November will bring out John Drinkwater's "Lincoln, the World Emancipator." John Burrougho's new book, "Accepting the Universe," will appear in October.

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"Naturalism in English Poetry," by the Rev. Stopford Brooke, is a series of lectures which he gave at University College, London. They are now published for the first time, and included with them are essays on "Shelley's Interpretation of Christianity" and "Byron's 'Cain.'" E. P. Dutton & Co. will issue the volume in September.

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"The Law of Hemlock Mountain," by Hugh Lundsford, a new writer, will be published by W. J. Watt & Co. in September. The author was born in Louisville, but has spent most of his life in the Kentucky Mountains among mediaeval folk, who have been called the only real Americans. In his story he contends that the mountaineers are not lawless and are intolerant only of those who break their rules.

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"Who Was Who?" is a companion book to "Who's Who?" and contains the biographies of those who died in the period, 1897-1916. It is one of the new publications of the Macmillan Company.

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"A History of Modern Colloquial English," by H. C. Wyld, which E. P. Dutton & Co. will publish soon, covers nearly five centuries of the development of ordinary speech.

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Harper & Bro. are preparing a new edition of James Otis's classic of boyhood, "Toby Tyler," which first appeared in *Harper's Young People* when Kirk Munroe was the editor.

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The success of the novel version of "Lightnin'" has set Frank Bacon to work more energetically on the completion of another novel and on plans for a third.